

STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COMMITTEE

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PUBLIC TESTIMONY

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Pam Stratton, Vice Chair
John Cannon
Jim Burton
Don Ford
Karla Jutzi
SueEllen O'Connor
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. ELSTAD: We're going to be starting the public testimony. What I'd like is the committee members to introduce themselves to the staff and visitors here, start with you, Don.

MR. FORD: I'm done Ford from Dillingham. I'm the consumer advocate. I've got four kids, three of which have developmental disabilities, and youngest being 17 right now.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Dave Schneider from Wasilla, I'm the employer representative.

MR. LEVINE: Don Levine, I'm the career technical education specialist from the Department of Education.

MS. JUTZI: I'm Karla Jutzi, the executive director at the Alaska Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and my role on the committee is as an community rehab provider.

MS. REINHARDT: I'm Christie Reinhardt, the parent training and information center program manager, which is Part D of IDEA special education providing parent-to-parent support for the State of Alaska at Stone Soup Group. That was big. And I'm the wife of a full time Army active duty NCO and a mother of a young man who has a developmental

disability and is gifted. So he's just trouble.

MS. SARABIA: Teresa Sarabia, Juneau, Alaska. Born and raised. I represent the Section .121 programs in the State of Alaska, the Tribal Voc Rehab programs, and there are ten of us. I'm a grandmother of a child with FAS. I'm also the grandmother of a child that's special education. Welcome.

PHILLIP ALBERT: Phillip Albert, I'm a VR counselor with TVR at TCC. I'm originally from the Village of Ruby, and father and grandfather of nine.

MS. WALSH: I'm Cheryl Walsh, and I'm the director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and I'm in Juneau.

MS. CURNS: Pam Curns, northern region manager.

MR. BURTON: I'm Jim Burton, I'm from Fairbanks, Alaska, I represent former and current clients, I'm on the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee.

MS. STRATTON: I'm Pam Stratton, I'm from Anchorage, and I'm the director of the Client Assistance Program for the state.

MS. O'CONNOR: I'm SueEllen O'Connor, and I'm a counselor in Wasilla and the statewide blind

services coordinator.

MR. CANNON: John Cannon, I'm from Wasilla, Alaska, I'm the executive director for Mat-Su Center for Children and Adults, community living services for folks with developmental disabilities. And I serve as the liaison between this community and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board.

MR. WEBB: I'm Rick Webb, I'm a member of the assistive technology steering committee underneath of the SVRC.

MS. ELSTAD: I'm Velja Elstad and I'm staff to the committee. I'd like to announce, if there is anybody that has not signed up for public testimony and they would like to testify today, please come and see me.

And we're going to start our testimony here, and Pam will be calling off names, and if people would please come and sit up here with us when you're giving your testimony, that would be great, thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Right now we have a couple people waiting on line, so maybe -- we're going to ask people -- we appreciate everybody who came to give testimony, but if we could limit people's comments to five to eight minutes so we'll have time to hear everybody, I would appreciate it. We're going

to start with somebody that's waiting on line.

MS. O'CONNOR: Who would like to go first on the phone?

SHANE VARIEUR: I would, I'm working presently, so the sooner I could get done the better.

MS. O'CONNOR: Can you tell us your name.

SHANE VARIEUR: Shane Varieur, I'm a client of Amy. I'd just like to state that DVR helped me immensely. They sent me down to NIT school and I'm presently a truck driver for Air-Land Transportation. They showed me my strengths and got me on the right direction and I'm presently working because of them.

MS. O'CONNOR: Wonderful, thank you. Would you please spell your name.

SHANE VARIEUR: S-h-a-n-e V-a-r-i-e-u-r.

MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you so much for your testimony.

SHANE VARIEUR: You bet.

MS. STRATTON: Okay. Galina Carlson.

GALINA CARLSON: Hi, hi name is Galena Carlson, I'm from Bulgaria. I was adopted in United States. I lived in an orphanage for almost 13 years. I really don't know -- I didn't know what to expect about America, or what to experience, but when I was

20 years old DVR started helping me and started working with me, that was almost eight years ago. And it's been a very, very long, long, long journey. And I just wanted to thank Mary Sweeney, she's the one who helped me through it all.

I remember just going in her office and making a lot of phone calls and talking to people and figuring it out what I'm going to do, what's best for my health, and just everything. And English was my second language also. So it was really, really hard.

So I went and signed in for TVC as cosmetology, so the budget was too much money for DVR to be able to afford it. And I remember Mary saying, I don't think we could pay. And I thought, oh, no, again, I just kept hearing it and hearing it. But the Pell Grant at the TVC, they jumped in quickly, and they were willing to help me, and Mary Sweeney. And things just quickly really happened. And after that it's just -- I got in and I went full time and I graduated. And now I'm working. And I just wanted to thank you so much, the DVR. And I want to also thank especially to Mary Sweeney, she just really helped me to dream big and believe big. Same with DVR. Thank you so much.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

MS. O'CONNOR: Who would like to go next on the phone?

JASON PARKER: I can, if that's all right.

MS. O'CONNOR: Sure, can you please give us your name.

JASON PARKER: Yeah, my name is Jason Parker. Well, I'm participating in DVR in Fairbanks, and my counselor is Eric. And DVR is just a fantastic program. I mean, I can't say enough good things about it. I mean, they helped me get things set up to where I could go to school. And I had to interrupt my school. They helped me with support services so that I could work and stuff like that. I can't really say enough good things about it. But DVR is a great program. That's about all I can say. It's just great.

MS. O'CONNOR: Well, we appreciate that very much, thank you.

JASON PARKER: Thank you all.

MS. STRATTON: Okay, next, Lane Delventhal.

LANE DELVENTHAL: My name is Lane, and basically to give you a little history, I've had a severe reading disability my whole life. I was on

state benefits and SSI and otherwise up until a couple years ago when someone mentioned that DVR could help me get a job. I never knew I could get a job. And then I've been on disability benefits since I was 13 because of my reading disability and my health problems. Basically nobody, I don't know why, but they just didn't tell me that I could do this.

When I went to them I had no idea how it would affect my benefits. They went and did a benefits analysis. They talked me through it. I don't know how to let you understand how much dignity there is in having people who understand that. Just because you don't look like you have a disability, you still do. And I know that sounds kind of odd, but just because I have the intelligence, which has been a curse most of my life, they allowed me to get into a job to where I can use that intelligence.

I now work for a business here in town where I am one of their top associates in my department. And DVR has come through for me over and over and over with computer training and other things that have helped me achieve the regional awards at my work and other things that I have done, and because of that, they have given me the ability to be myself and to be myself at work. And there is a great massive

amount of dignity that comes with the work, especially when you've been on income your whole life.

MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you so much for coming. Is there someone else on the phone that would like to testify?

DANIEL PANAMAROFF: Yeah, I'd like to go.

MS. O'CONNOR: What's your name?

DANIEL PANAMAROFF: Daniel Panamaroff. I'm from Kenai. I moved to attend school at UAF Community College -- Community and Technical College. They changed their name last year.

I started working with Fairbanks DVR last year, and my counselor is Kim. And I would like to thank them for their help. Any time I've needed them I give them a call and they help me out whatever they can, whether it's housing or helping me on a plan to get rid of a disability. I have several disabilities that are all related to morbid obesity, and Kim worked with me on a plan, getting a nutrition plan going and weight loss and stuff like that so when I'm done with school I'll be able to be in shape to get the kind of job that I want.

And I just can't thank Fairbanks DVR enough. And I'd like to thank Cook Inlet Tribal

Council TVR, I've been working with Pinky Tooyak since last year also, and they helped me so much. I moved to Fairbanks and wasn't prepared for the harsh winter, and they helped me with winter clothes and transportation, money for gas, and just so many things I can't even list them all. And I'd just like to thank DVR so much. It's a great program and it really helps people get back on their feet again.

MS. O'CONNOR: Well, thank you so much, Daniel. Can you please spell your last name.

DANIEL PANAMAROFF: P-a-n-a-m-a-r-o-f-f.

MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you again for your testimony.

MS. STRATTON: Okay, Jamie Ziegler.

JAMIE ZIEGLER: My name is Jamie Ziegler, and I have a reading disability. I've known the English language, but I've never known how to spell it or read it. In the last six months I have learned how. It's like opening up a new world. I live a hundred miles away, so I have to come up twice a week, and DVR provides gas and food for me to stay when I come up here.

And I have a sleeping disorder. They provide my medicine so I can sleep more than one hour a day. If it wasn't for DVR I don't know where I'd

be. I'd probably be at the same place. And my goal is to learn not to have a disability and be able to read. And I appreciate everything that they have done for me. So thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you very much for coming.

MS. O'CONNOR: Is there anyone else on the phone?

MS. STRATTON: Okay, Klaus Reeck. I'm sorry if I said that last name wrong.

KLAUS REECK: Reeck. I'm Klaus Reeck, and DVR has helped me immensely. They say disabilities, you can't see, but they have done wonders for me. They were there when I needed them, and they have treated me like a human, and a lot of people don't. And I'd just love to say thank you to Beth and Susie, God bless you all, thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Is there anybody else on the phone waiting to testify? Okay, Pat Allison.

PAT ALLISON: I'm Pat Allison, and I've been working with Liz. I'm going to school with the help of DVR and Dislocated Workers. And now I'm working at going to look for a job that is going to give me a career, and it's been a blessing to have her

as my worker. She stays with me, she supports me.
I've gotten assistance with medical and food and
supplies, which is something that's above and beyond,
I think, but it really helps me from day-to-day.
Thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Barb Roberts.

BARB ROBERTS: Hi, my name is Barb
Roberts. I just started working with Liz recently,
and I'm going to be going to school soon. And I'm
thrilled to death about the opportunity to be able to
go back to school, to do a job that I have done in the
past that I couldn't get a job up here. The questions
I have are things like if you need Internet in order
to be going to school, why the phone can't be paid for
when that's the way that I can get the Internet, and
that just increases bills for us. So I wanted to
bring that up, and, you know, give you guys an idea
that you're adding bills where we can't afford bills.
And but at the same time to let you know I'm very
thankful for all the help you're giving, thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Alphonozo
Hampton.

ALPHONOZO HAMPTON: Hello. DVR, I got a
history with DVR, and it started back in Juneau. But
I have two DVR counselors, one in Juneau was Lynn

Davis, and now I'm my counselor here is Margaret, she's perfect. But the help that I've gotten from DVR has been -- I can't even -- I've gotten everything that I need to make it -- I got a Class A and I started my own business all through DVR, dog training.

My history is I went to prison, I left prison -- went in prison with no job skills as a young guy. I got out at 35 -- excuse me, 34, with nothing. But the training skills -- I learned to train dogs in prison because of some other people's generosity. We turned out a lot of service dogs. A lot of good adoptable dogs, that was a whole separate program. But I left prison with just that. I couldn't make a living with that.

And because of Lynn I got a Class A, I can drive truck, I was able to make a living. And because of Margaret I got my dog training business off the ground, and, you know, I'm doing all right. I ain't making a ton of money, but I'm living. I'm not suffering. I'm not really struggling. I'm working two jobs and barely making it. I'm doing great.

And my disabilities, I have to work with my hands, and I can't do it in the cold, and my hands and my feet go cold real quick. And it's just -- I'm shut down in the winter if I have to work, and there

is only certain types of work that I can do. I'm not a computer guy, I'm a hammer and nails type of guy, I work with my hands, and I can't do that, and I'm out of work because of -- and because of DVR I got everything I need. I don't have any excuses.

And I tell everybody that I know that's in prison in my same situation, if you want to make it, if you want something, you want a direction, I tell them about DVR. I give them all the information that I have so that when they do come out they got someplace to go. They got no excuses. Thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

MS. O'CONNOR: Is there anyone else on the phone waiting to testify?

MS. STRATTON: I just want to thank everybody that came to testify, hopefully we'll have a few more coming in. But we appreciate you taking the time. And I know it's not always easy to come and face a large group and give your testimony, and we really appreciate you coming. And also suggestions or ideas, things that you think maybe could work a little better a different way, that's always helpful to hear, so thank you all. And we do have some written testimony we're going to have read into the record.

MR. CANNON: Thank you. This one is

anonymous. Dated September 21st for the Governor's Committee public testimony.

I would like to express my appreciation for the tremendous assistance I have received from the Fairbanks branch of the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the past five years.

I first contacted DVR in 2005 at a friend's suggestion. By that time I had already had three arthroscopic surgeries in my knees and was recovering from back fusion surgery all as a result of degenerative osteoarthritis. This is a test.

Limitations from the arthritis had become so severe that my employment options were restricted, and I did not have adequate training or education to pursue other jobs. The Exploring Your Career Goals workshop was extremely beneficial and helped me identify new employment options that would be possible given my physical limitations. The services available through DVR enabled me to return to school and prepare myself for employment in a new field.

While returning to school as a non-traditional student has certainly been challenging at times, it has also been incredibly rewarding. DVR has provided significant financial assistance for my

education and my counselors have been professional, supportive, and encouraging every step of the way.

I expect to graduate in 2011 with the certifications necessary to apply for one of the many job openings in a new and exciting field. Without the support of DVR I would not have been able to prepare myself to pursue this new career. The assistance has been life changing. I'm incredibly grateful for the doors that have been opened for me, and I look forward to being able to give back to my community through my new profession. Thank you for making these services available for me and for others in my community who experience disabilities.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you, John. Gregory DaMota.

GREGORY DaMOTA: Hi, my name is Greg, I've had epilepsy since I was 14 years old, and it's extremely hard getting a job anywhere with epilepsy. People look at you as a hazard to yourself, a hazard to the company. And up until a year ago I really had no idea what I wanted to do with my life.

I had a daughter and one child on the way, and I was working pretty much a dead end job where they didn't want to move me up because my epilepsy. I found DVR through a friend, and I decided

to go there for the workshop and the orientation.

They helped me find a career path. Liz helped me figure out what I wanted to do with my life. And they helped me get into school, helped me with the tools, everything I needed to become a certified diesel mechanic.

Now I'm currently working a job, and that explains why I'm so dirty, and I just wanted to say that I appreciate all the help I've gotten. Words couldn't explain how helpful this has been and how much this has really brought up my self-confidence. And I really needed that. And I appreciate everything you've all done for me.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Bill Love.

BILL LOVE: Yes, my name is Bill Love, and I'm not a hundred percent prepared. I've been crazy working. And I want to say if it not for Voc Rehab and the individuals that are there and their heart and their hard efforts, I wouldn't be where I'm at. I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not where I was.

I have some issues that have to be dealt with because they can go a hundred percent full-fledge with me, but I have total confidence. And everybody has been excellent and they ought to be applauded.

They are not doing it for numbers, they are doing it for heart of the people. And I've helped other people out. I have a counseling degree, and I've been working in Fairbanks to help all the way around more than just washing windows and cleaning carpets, thank you.

MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

MS. O'CONNOR: Is there someone on the phone that would like to provide testimony?

MS. STRATTON: We have some other written testimony.

MS. REINHARDT: This is from an Ellen Balcer to Ron Boynton, the chair of the committee.

Dear Mr. Boynton, I'm a disabled person that has had back surgery. I have osteoporosis and some mental disabilities. I receive retirement disability and SSDI. I had a career as a custodian working for the school district. I was going to retire when I was 60. I made \$22 an hour. I heard they received a 20 percent raise over the next three years, and they got medical costs somewhat under control compared to other unions. I told DVR I wanted a job as an administrative assistant. I went to UAF and took the test to enroll in college. All my scores

are below university level. My plan changed one day when my counselor wrote my IEP. We agreed I would go to computer school and learn Word and Excel for success in typing. I did not think my training would stop there. My counselor told me she does IEP for one year at a time. I told myself I would get a job where I could advance. It said I would try to get a job as a receptionist. They do not advance. This is at least a \$12 pay cut.

My psychiatrist does not think I can handle a high stress job. I'm limited to 10 pounds of lifting. There is a number of things I cannot do that a normal person can. We have yet to find a job fit for me. They hired a job developer to help me seek employment. They cannot even find me a job shadow. I can understand why people do not trust a stranger coming into their workplace. They may never have heard of DVR.

What is the big hurry? I had a choice to assign my Ticket to Work. I also had the right to take it back. I want to learn. I want to be able to work until the day I die. I need help in achieving my goals, not to hurry up and settle. I want an education to help me have the skills I need to achieve my goals. A receptionist job is a nowhere job.

Unless I work and go to school I'm not going anywhere.

I cannot work and go to school because of my mental disabilities. The doctor only wants me to work part time. He said that I should work closely with the supervisor.

I realize that you do not have to be a genius to be a custodian, but it takes some talent and a lot of responsibilities and trust. I feel bad when I think about my future. It really breaks my heart. I'm now stuck and limited. If the trend continues, I would like to go to college and get a job as an administrative assistant. I'm not beyond paying for them myself. I need higher math scores and higher English scores. All my scores were very low. I do not know how to change my IEP. Computer skills are necessary for any desk job. I'm thankful for them. Nevertheless, I still would like -- I would still make more at my old career as a custodian. I have to take care of me. Why did I pay into Social Security and retirement all those years. I'm not trying to bash my counselor, I know she's answering to someone, alternatively she may have too many clients. I'm not happy with my current IEP. I do not like having a job developer that makes \$60 an hour coming up with, as I suspected, nothing. Is it my mental disability? On

the other hand, is it because I did not speak up when she wrote my IEP?

If I could change this mess I would gladly take the blame. The bottom line is my choice of employment was to be an administrative assistant. I had a career. I want one back. I am not 16 and able to start from the bottom. I'm 50, I need to know my future will be secure. There are many jobs for an administrative assistant, as I've been researching them. I do not have the qualifications to interview for that type of work. I need to be educated. I think that I'm one of the reasons they wrote the Americans with Disabilities Act. Sincerely yours, Ellen Balcer. And she copied it to the Governor.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Laurel Johnston?

LAUREL JOHNSTON: Hello, I'm Laurel Johnston. I worked with DVR for several years, and I've been very pleased with them. Kim is my counselor. She's helped me get into one position. I lost that job because of the position being gone, and now I'm going to school. They have backed me, they have helped me, now I'm making the decision of what job I should go for, but also what kind of education I should try for.

Basically I'm very, very pleased with everything that they have done with me. They have really stepped in. When I first started Kim was only just starting herself, so I had her from the very beginning, and she's been a really, really outstanding person.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

MS. O'CONNOR: Is there anybody else on line that would like to testify?

MS. STRATTON: Okay on, we've got 15 more minutes, so we'll be here, we'll wait to see if anybody else calls in. But I would like to say thank you to everyone. Feel free to stick around and we can visit while we wait for other people to come.

(Break)

MS. STRATTON: We have two more people to testify.

MS. O'CONNOR: Can you tell me who is on the line, who is on the phone? Can you tell me your name?

JANICE LOPEZ: My name is Janice Lopez and I'm calling on behalf of my daughter Tammy Hunt.

MS. O'CONNOR: All right, go ahead.

JANICE LOPEZ: Yes, I was just calling to let you know how grateful we are for all the help

that the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation here in Fairbanks has been to us.

MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you very much for sharing, is there anything else?

JANICE LOPEZ: We want everybody to know how special these people are and how warm and family friendly they are and how much help they have been, and we really appreciate them.

MS. O'CONNOR: Great, thank you so much.

JANICE LOPEZ: You bet. And thank you for listening.

MS. O'CONNOR: Sure, of course.

JANICE LOPEZ: Bye-bye.

MS. O'CONNOR: Is there anyone else on the phone?

MS. STRATTON: Okay, we have Nina Rawson.

NINA RAWSON: As you know, there are lots of different organizations and agencies in Fairbanks that help people with disabilities, and I consider Voc Rehab the nucleus of that cell, and the cell being the Fairbanks disability community.

One of the procedures that I find to be most helpful to the client, DVR and the vendor, or the counselor, job developer, is the initial meeting that

DVR conducts. It's kind of a hand-over meeting, as I call it. It becomes very clear to all who attend what is expected of each of us, and any concerns of the client is answered at that time. So I find that hand-over meeting to be very helpful.

One of the things I would like to see is a representative from Job Center, I don't really see anybody here today. And a point person that's located over at Job Center that will help the people that are coming in that were referred from various agencies to attend their job training orientation, to use their resource room, and their workshops, so they don't fall through the cracks and they don't do double work.

Because a lot of them are working with the counselors now, they don't need the services of the workshops, and yet they are telling them to attend those workshops. So I'd like to see some kind of person over at Job Center -- and I had been there for 25 years, so I have a history with them -- so that they can have a smoother transition and coming into Job Service, or Job Center. It's a bigger place than coming into the resource room at DVR. And a lot of them, a lot of people do not want to walk into that place. Having someone representing and being the liaison between the agencies I think would be most

helpful.

And also I want to give kudos to the counselors' assistants for answering the telephone when I call. And also for responding to my e-mails and phone calls in a very timely manner. So thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. We're waiting for somebody else.

(Break)

MS. STRATTON: We have two more individuals to testify. Nicholette Price.

NICHOLETTE PRICE: Hi, my name is Nicholette Price, sorry I'm out of breath, we've been running around all day. I wanted to make it here. Just got out of a class.

Thanks to DVR I'm going to school and I'm going to get my medical assistant associate's degree within two years. I just started this semester, and I just want to say that DVR has done a lot for me. They are helping me with my medical, getting my -- helping me get back on my feet so that I can get back out in the world and back out to society and do something good.

And I'm just -- everybody at DVR has been awesome. I can't say enough about the staff and

my case manager and Ellen and her assistant, they have just really been there for me. I'm grateful, and I'm just really grateful to be here, and that's pretty much all I have to say.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you.

NICHOLETTE PRICE: Thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Ruth Hansen.

RUTH HANSEN: Hello, I'm Ruth Hansen.

And yeah, I've been studying all day, too. I was up there taking a test, I got lost in time, and it was a mad dash to try to get here.

And thanks to DVR I had to be in a mad rush. They helped me get into school. I was homeless for a long time, and now I'm working with DVR and being led through doors that I didn't know were there to open. It's such a great help. They have helped me go in the right direction to -- now I'm receiving disability, and with DVR's help I'm getting retrained into the work field again and into the College of Applied Business. So I'm going for clerical instead of doing heavy lifting. It's wonderful.

I've got my own place to live now after two years of nothing, and I'm going to school. I'm just -- I'm on the right track, and it's -- a lot of it is so much help. I always call up, something is

wrong, don't have enough money for a book, the money was there for a book for the school. And they followed me through the whole school. And I'm going to get my certificate and the position I like.

That's about all I have to say. I've seen people that I get in a conversation with and that leads to DVR, is all I can say is good. Case manager Pat Harmon and Susie, they are always there. That's all I can say is they are always there. I feel very fortunate to be in the position I'm at. I'm happy, and that's what I've got to say. Thank you.

MS. STRATTON: Thank you. Thank you again everyone for coming today, we really appreciate you coming, and the staff coming for us to get to meet you, too, so thank you all. We're adjourned. We have one more written testimony to add:

Today's disabled people are finding it hard to find jobs, and also are the 50 and above who have the skills of the old school that still fit into today's society.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has found me two jobs in two years and this job is a perfect match. Working with other agencies, they get the job done and keep the people working.

They also prepare people for interviews, job searches. Michele Prouty has been the best counselor you can have. She takes care of all your needs, both physically and mentally. She stays in touch with your boss, other agencies and doctors for certain problems. She's a gem. She's an asset to your company.

(Meeting adjourned)